

HOSPITAL BLUE WRAP

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Plastics: Hospital Recycling & Waste Reduction:

The California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) is looking for opportunities to work with the hospital industry to facilitate blue wrap recycling. The CIWMB has developed a Hospital Waste Reduction Team to assist with waste assessments and to identify the right connections to maximize recycling success.

CIWMB staff work in concert with local governments, haulers, recyclers, and hospital representatives to support efforts to recycle and add to a hospital's bottom line (by reducing costs and increasing efficiency). CIWMB staff can help facilitate the initial communication in order to build these relationships.

What Is Blue Wrap?

- Blue wrap is made from polypropylene (# 5 plastic).
- Blue wrap is used for wrapping surgical instruments for sterilization.
- Blue wrap is generated and used in only a few areas (e.g. surgical rooms).
- Sterile, uncontaminated blue wrap can be collected for recycling.



Sterile surgical kits covered with blue wrap

Why Reduce Blue Wrap?



Used blue wrap

- Hospitals pay a higher rate for red bag waste vs. regular trash disposal. Industry methods that reduce hospital costs, while ensuring that quality patient care is not compromised, are worth pursuing.
- Industry estimates nearly 20 percent of the waste stream is from surgical services (materials going to red bag or trash disposal). Much of this waste is clean blue wrap.
- Consider the surgical services locations, where the most blue wrap is generated, to maximize initial blue wrap recycling.

Alternatives to Disposing Blue Wrap:

- Switch to hard surgical cases made of metal.
- Switch to reusable/washable fabric that can be sterilized numerous times.
- Recycle the blue wrap.

The options for minimizing blue wrap can vary. Hospitals are saving overhead costs by switching to metal surgical cases, as well as reducing disposal fees through increased recycling programs.

Getting Started: Recycling Blue Wrap:

With any new program, gaining staff acceptance and support are critical. Ask staff how they envision the program would work. The other key is to focus on an area of hospital operations known to produce *clean* materials. The recycling market prefers clean plastics. Blue wrap is commonly found in the laboratory and surgical services departments.

1. Ask charge nurses and the sterile processing department for feedback on developing a blue wrap waste reduction and recycling program.

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2. Request information from the hospital about how much blue wrap is purchased every week/month (to get a sense of how much is being discarded).
3. Build your lead recycle “team” – to develop, implement, and monitor the recycling program, and to educate hospital staff.
4. Work with the hospital’s local waste hauler, and city or county recycling coordinator, and discuss the hospital’s desire to recycle blue wrap and other plastics. Request necessary collection bins and pick-up service.
 - Alternatively, ask the existing janitorial/hospital supply companies if they can backhaul (each time they bring a supply delivery) and consolidate blue wrap (for pick-up by a processor).
 - Alternatively, ask the existing confidential document shredding company if they can backhaul and consolidate blue wrap for recycling.
5. Build management support (based on minimizing blue wrap waste and reducing overall disposal costs).

Plan the Logistics with Cooperation of the Key Participants:

- Arrange adequate loading dock space for blue wrap storage for pick-up.
- Organize the availability of labor and equipment for on-site consolidation and possible baling.
- Contract for the necessary pick-up services from existing (local) providers.
- Plan the layout for existing or additional collection bins, types of bins, and locations where they are needed.

Implement and Monitor the Program:

- Once the logistics are planned, train staff on the recycling process. Establish regular meetings with relevant departments and hospital staff that handle blue wrap and discuss implementation. Include discussion regarding how the clean material is collected and where; who is responsible for what; and how the material is consolidated and taken to the storage area for recycling pick-up.
- Include a method of monitoring and evaluation weekly and monthly; determine successful areas and where improvements in efficiency may be needed. Start out small and build upon your successes!
- Educate all hospital staff about the program and encourage their support.
- Evaluate progress on a yearly basis regarding how much has been recycled and related cost savings (i.e. reduced disposal costs). Report your successes to management.

Like any business, the ability to promote good public relations through city and county media will show your community commitment. Also consider participating in CIWMB’s annual [Waste Reduction Awards Program](#) for recognition of your current programs.

Resources, Tools, and Links to Build Partnerships:

CIWMB: Hospital Waste Reduction Team led by [Melissa Vargas](#)

- [Local government connections](#)
- Waste assessments for hospitals (available through CIWMB).
- Vendor listing of recyclers/processors who accept blue wrap (available through CIWMB).
- Nonprofit connections, such as [StopWaste.org](#)
- [California Department of Public Health](#)
- [U.S. EPA Region 9](#)
- [Practice Green Health](#)
(H2E/Hospitals for a Healthy Environment is now part of Practice Green Health).
- CIWMB’s [Health Care Waste](#)

The CIWMB Hospital Waste Reduction Team is ready to assist you! We have a website that is being updated, as well as a listserv that will be launched soon. Our hauler/broker/processor vendor list is updated often and we welcome any vendor information resources you have available. The team also collects information about organizations that may provide potential funding to hospitals through grants or other assistance. Additionally, the team is partnering with the California Department of Public Health, as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to promote blue wrap recycling and other recycling programs.

Remember waste reduction, reuse, and recycling strategies can save money and increase your bottom line!